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The hope of the Church

THE HOPE OF THE CHURCH.

A
MISSIONARY ADDRESS,

DELIVERED

BEFORE THE SYNOD OF NEW YORK,

AT

PEEKSKILL, N.Y., OCTOBER 17, 1865.

WITH NOTES.

✓ BY

JOHN LILLIE, D.D.

NEW YORK:
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NEW YORK, October 30, 1865.

DEAR SIR :

The Address which you recently delivered before the Synod of New York, in regard to the chronological relation of the Second Advent of our Lord to His millennial kingdom, contains principles of Scripture interpretation, which, in our judgment, demand the earnest attention of the Church of God. It was a high satisfaction to those of us who were present on that occasion, to hear these principles presented in so clear and impressive a manner. Under these circumstances, we naturally desire to secure for the Address a wide circulation. In this desire we are joined by other brethren who were not present, and whose names are here appended. We unite, therefore, in the earnest request that you would do us the favor to furnish a copy, at your earliest convenience, for publication.

CHARLES K. IMBRIE,
N. WEST,
R. W. DICKINSON,
AUGS. CRUIKSHANK,]
A. D. L. JEWETT,
W. B. LEE,
STEPHEN L. MERSHON,
WM. IRVIN,
A. B. CONGER,
JAS. HARKNESS,
J. D. WELLS,
E. R. CRAVEN.

To Rev. JNO. LILLIE, D. D.

KINGSTON, N. Y., Nov. 11, 1865.

DEAR BRETHREN :

I cheerfully place at your disposal the Address of which you request a copy for publication. The Notes, which have been added on the suggestion of some of yourselves, and of other brethren, will not, I trust, be thought to impair whatever adaptation it may have for usefulness.

Yours, in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ,

JOHN LILLIE.

To the Rev. Drs. IMBRIE, WEST, }
DICKINSON, and others. }

MISSIONARY ADDRESS.

THAT the Church of Christ lives, and moves, and has her being, under a solemn and perpetual obligation to preach Christ's gospel, to the uttermost of her ability and opportunity, to every creature (Mark xvi. 15);—that Christ Himself, for whom, during His absence, the Church and the Holy Ghost are witnesses, will come again in visible, personal glory, to fulfil the promises, and execute the judgment written (Acts i. 11; Ps. cxlix. 9);—that, finally, there is a period in the future history of our world when “the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea,” and “they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for they shall all know Him from the least of them unto

the greatest of them" (Is. xi. 9; Jer. xxxi. 34); —on these points there exists, I believe, no doubt or difference of opinion amongst Christians of our day; certainly there is none amongst the members of this Synod. The agreement, however, does not extend to the question of the relation in which these points stand to one another; and to that question, therefore, as one not merely of profoundest interest in itself, but of direct bearing on the life of faith and hope, as well as on the immediate prospects of Christendom, I beg leave now to call the attention of my brethren. (Note A.)

The prevalent opinion in many quarters, especially in the churches of Great Britain and America, undoubtedly is, that the predicted triumph of the gospel, in the universal reign of righteousness and peace, shall precede our Lord's Second Advent, and shall itself be the proper and natural result of the missionary and other evangelistic labours of His followers.

Now, it must needs be confessed that this view, common as it is, and however great a favourite on the missionary platform, is at any rate of recent origin. It is very questionable

whether, even so late as two hundred years ago, it had yet been heard of amongst good men. Not a trace of it is to be found in the Standards of Westminster, or in the Confessions and other remains of the Reformation period, and quite as little in the writings of the Fathers. It cannot, therefore, allege the authority of antiquity in its behalf. On the contrary, nothing could be easier than to adduce from the records of those past times any required amount of repugnant and irreconcilable statement. (Note B.)

But this fact, although a fair ground certainly for suspicion, is not necessarily fatal to the theory. It is just possible, nevertheless, that the theory, novel as it is, may be one of the many interesting and useful discoveries that are the boast and ornament of our present civilization ; and if so, of course it rests on some equally solid and intelligible, however newly detected, foundation.

What, then, let us inquire, is the foundation that sustains this so popular idea of a holy and peaceful world, redeemed from Satan and the idols, and basking for long ages in the smile of God, prior to the "appearing and kingdom" (2 Tim. iv. 1) of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ?

Such an inquiry is often met by a good deal of eloquent discourse about what is called the power of truth—the truth, especially, of revelation. But that will not do for us, who believe that Divine truth itself has no inherent power whatsoever to convert a single soul, any more than the sun's ray can give sight to the blind, or quicken the dead.

Then, it is said that God has a special interest in the gospel, and exercises a watchful supervision over its progress in the earth. Which, no doubt, is true enough ; but it is very far from proving anything in regard to “the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in His own power.” (Acts i. 7.) We know that God never speaks in vain, and that not one word, which goeth forth out of His mouth, shall return to Him void ; but what, in any instance, shall be the particular effect of that word in the moral and spiritual sphere, is altogether a different question. He himself assures us that “it shall accomplish that which He pleases, and shall prosper in the thing whereto He sent it.” (Is. lv. 11.) But that does by no means enable us to determine what the thing is, that pleases God in the mission of His word,

and whose prosperous accomplishment is thus secured. The word spoken in Paradise did not fail, when Adam fell. The word thundered forth on the top of Sinai did not fail, because at the foot of the burning, quaking mount, the tribes ran riot in idolatry. The ministry of prophets was no failure, though few or none believed their report, and most of them died the death of martyrs. Nay, when the Personal Word himself became incarnate, and spake as never man spake, the Living Witness to His own truth, what followed? The judgment hall and the cross. Was, then, Christ's life on earth a failure, any more than His death? He was "despised and rejected of men" (Is. liii. 3), and so, with the vast majority of men, even in so-called Christian lands, He continues, and that after eighteen hundred years of gospel preaching, to this day. There is surely little evidence in all this that, at the end of eighteen thousand years of gospel preaching, matters would be essentially changed.

And is it not, in arguing this great question, an illogical fatuity of which school-boys might be ashamed, to retail to us, as is sometimes done, with whatever pathos and graphic power, this or that case of striking individual conver-

sion, and all the while ignore the immense, multitudinous majority of cases of obdurate impenitence?

And yet, all the while God's word is accomplishing that which He pleases, and prospering in the thing whereto He sent it. And when the witnesses "shall have finished their testimony" (Rev. xi. 7), the mighty and infallible efficacy of the truth which they proclaimed will be no longer scoffed at, or doubted, by any. For then will be revealed its two-fold eternal demonstration, heaven and hell. In the believing anticipation of both, the great Apostle looked up from the scene of his conflicts, and exclaimed: "We are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish." (2 Cor. ii. 15.)

We may, therefore, very safely dismiss at once all such *quasi*-philosophical reasoning from what we might suppose to be the nature of the case, as well as our own poor *a priori* notions as to what would be the most fitting course for God to pursue in the creation of the new heavens and new earth of prophecy. "His thoughts are not our thoughts, neither are our ways His ways."

(Is. lv. 8; lxx. 17.) Most assuredly we know, and can know, nothing whatever on this subject, except what He has chosen to tell us. And so the whole matter just comes to this: What proof is there in Scripture, that this world is to be renewed by the gospel before the Lord returns?

Now you, brethren, may have been more fortunate than I; but, so far as I can recollect, the only show of proof of this kind that I have ever met with, has consisted in liberal quotations from the old Hebrew prophets of their glowing descriptions of "the times of restitution of all things" (Acts iii. 21);—quotations made freely enough and in the lump, but without much scrutiny of their textual connection. These beautiful extracts, therefore, treated in this easy off-hand style, while conclusively establishing the blessed fact that such times are still in reserve, since they have not been seen yet, shed no light at all on the only point that we are here concerned with, to wit, the chronological relation of events.

No sooner, however, do we look into those prophecies for ourselves, than we perceive that the bright consummation is never once referred to as that in which these "times of the Gentiles"

(Luke xxi. 24) are to issue through a process of gradual amelioration. Uniformly it is introduced by God's returning favour to Israel—by the wrathful destruction of His and their enemies in the hour of their greatest strength and confidence—by the appearing of the Lord in His glory to build up Zion—and by the resurrection of the dead.

I shall not stop to make good this statement (Note C), as I think could readily be done in all its parts. Our time will barely suffice for a rapid glance at the teaching of the New Testament on this topic.

For surely in the New Testament, if anywhere, we may fairly expect to find some clear intimation of the universal triumph of the gospel during the present dispensation, if indeed any such thing is to occur. In leaving His disciples without the strength and joy of His presence, and sending them forth to their "great fight of afflictions" (Heb. x. 32), the compassionate Saviour cannot surely have concealed from them the fact, if it be a fact, that through their preaching, and the instrumentality of the Church which they were to found in His name,

the world at large, all its hostile governments and populations, should, during His dreaded absence, be subdued to the love and service of their Lord.

Now, my first remark is, that never once did our Lord himself, while He was still with us, let fall a single word that could fairly be understood as encouraging any such hope!—silence most significant, if not at once decisive of the whole question. To my mind it is decisive, when, in addition to that fact, we find that, in foreshowing the reception His servants and their message should meet with in the world, He speaks of little else but rejection, and contumely, and wrong, as their present portion. He even instances it as a proof of His fidelity, that He has “told us before” (Matt. xxiv. 25). With what an earnest solemnity does He set forth Himself as the example of suffering to all His people! “If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his Lord. If they have per-

secuted me, they will also persecute you ; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also.” (John xv. 18–20.)

If it is objected, that these words were addressed to our Lord’s immediate disciples, and *may have* no application to the ages that were to follow, we might, in reply, urge the demand : Where has our Lord so much as hinted that the mutual relations of the Church and the world are ever, during this economy, to differ from what they were in the days of His flesh, and in His apostles’ days ? But it is far from being true that the Great Teacher is merely silent and neutral on the point. “Let both tares and wheat grow together *until the harvest*” (Matt. xiii. 30), said the householder to his impatient servants ; and so the wicked shall not be severed from among the just, “until the end of this age, when the righteous shall shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.” (vv. 40–43.) Or, according to that other parabolic illustration of the same truth, the gospel net is still out at sea, and very various are the kinds of fish it has enclosed. By-and-by, “at the end of the age,” not sooner, it shall be “drawn to shore,” and the angels shall “sit down and gather the

good into vessels, but cast the bad away.”
(vv. 47-49.)

Or take the great prophetic discourse in Matthew's Gospel (xxiv., xxv.), and nothing can well be more conclusive. It will be remembered that the curiosity and queries of the disciples reached onward to the time of their Lord's promised return ; and His answer embraces the whole period that was to intervene. Where, then, I ask, is there in all that picture of Gentile times, sketched by the hand of Omniscience, I say not the shadow of a millennium, but a vacant spot even where it can be introduced? Is not the entire canvas crowded with the symbols and ensigns of a “great tribulation”? and do not these tokens rather increase in number and terror as the final catastrophe draws near? We see the Holy City in ruins, and its sacred dust trampled for ages and generations by insulting Gentiles. The gospel, indeed, can be traced in her march throughout “all the world, for a witness unto all nations” (Note D); but neither are we suffered for an instant to forget that her road lies through an enemy's land. Troops of antichrists, impostors, and apostates, hover round and assault her at every step of her progress. Their re-

sources of violence and fraud are seconded, we can observe, by the malignity and force of devils, "working miracles"; until, through their joint influence, instead of the world being transformed into the Church, the Church itself is apparently lost in the world, and the fearful question is put deliberately, as if it were a doubtful matter to the eye of the descending Judge: "Nevertheless, when the Son of Man cometh, shall He find faith in the earth?"

Notwithstanding the confidence, therefore, of those who are expecting their millennium during the Saviour's absence—"times of refreshing," but not "from the presence of the Lord"—the "restitution of all things," but without the visible hand of the great Restorer (Acts iii. 19, 21)—they will never be able to alter the fact, that the discourses of Christ are simply irreconcilable with their theory—in other words, with all those pleasant anticipations of glorious, happy times in this present evil world, with which Christians have been comforting, and, as I believe, deluding one another, of late years. (Note E.)

But perhaps these gloomy prognostications of evil were subsequently relieved by revelations

made to the Church through the Apostles. Well, is it so? Read first the record of their Acts, and then their writings from the beginning of Romans to the last verse of Jude, and mark the text, if it can be found, which brightens in the least the temporal prospects of the faith. Brethren, there is no such text. If there be, let it be named. On the other hand, hours might be spent in barely quoting the texts which prove to a demonstration, that the appropriate work of this age is, not to convert the whole world—still less to be ever talking about so great a work, and yet doing, alas, how little!—flinging, that is, a very few of the smallest crumbs from our table—for its accomplishment (Note F);—but it is, at every sacrifice of labour and of money, by the might of faith, the activity of love, and the energy of prayer, to gather out of the world the elect “Church of God, which He purchased with His own blood.” (Acts xx. 28.) The missionary or the church, whose zeal would be in danger of being damped by having *this* result proposed to them as the reward of their efforts, is not likely, in our humble opinion, to do a great deal in the way of converting the world, either in one generation, according to the enthusiastic cal-

culuation of some, or in ten thousand generations.
(Note G.)

At all events, it was a task that satisfied the ambition of primitive martyrs. Humbly to subject their own schemes to the Divine plan, and carefully to correct and chasten their own fondest hopes by the Divine promise, was one of the first lessons taught them by the Spirit of Pentecost. "Men and brethren," said James, in the council of Jerusalem, "hearken unto me : Simeon hath declared, how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, *to take out of them a people for His name.*" (Acts xv. 13, 14.) This—if we will believe the Apostles—this, and nothing more than this, is the immediate design of God in the present marvellous dispensation, while Jerusalem is trodden down of the Gentiles, and the rapturous harps of Judah hang silent on the willows. It is not, because it was not intended by God to be, a dispensation of effectual blessing to all mankind. It is altogether, and from first to last, and in every land, partial and limited in its influences and triumphs, the apostolic age being in this respect, not merely the prelude, but a sample, and surely a very favourable sample, of the whole. To include, therefore, in that whole such ulterior

facts as the binding of Satan, and the casting him out of the earth—the national restoration of the Jews, and the national conversion of both Jews and Gentiles—the cleansing of man's dwelling place from the pollutions and oppressions, the sins and sorrows, the tears, and blood, and curse of ages—in a word, to claim for our Gentile times, and as the certain fruit of Gentile missions, the introduction of millennial holiness and peace and joy, is simply a delusion of that very Gentile conceit, against which the Apostle of the Gentiles so earnestly warned us. (Rom. xi. 25.) Evidently the inspired prolocutor of that first and greatest of Ecclesiastical Councils had no such idea. And yet we may suppose that in largeness of view, and in ardour of zeal, James was not a whit behind those in our day, who have sometimes distinguished themselves by a nice estimate of the amount of money required to convert the world in thirty years. Surrounded as he was by the supernatural splendour and energies of Pentecost, his undazzled eye meekly followed the finger of God, as it wrought in quite different style towards a quite different consummation. God, said he, is "visiting the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for His name."

And just so Paul, even in his most ecstatic mood, did not look for the ceasing of the groans of the burdened Church, or of the sympathetic groans of a travailing creation, until the times of the resurrection of the dead at the appearing of Christ, and the manifestation along with Him of all the sons of God. (Rom. viii. 19-23.)*

Having unfolded elsewhere,† I shall here say nothing of the unanswerable argument furnished by Paul's prophetic account in the Second Epistle to the Thessalonians, of the Antichristian Apostacy, and its relations to Christ's Second Advent. Indeed, with regard to all the Epistles, I must content myself with reminding you, that the same dead silence prevails throughout as to the expected conquest of the world, while intimations of the most unequivocal character abound of a vast increase of error and ungodliness in the latter days. Call to mind, dear brethren, the appalling portraitures, as given by Paul (1 Tim. iv. 1-3; 2 Tim. iii. 1-9), and Peter (2 Pet. ii.), and Jude, of the leading features that shall mark the close of the Gentile dispensation—descrip-

* For a discussion of this text, see my volume on *The Perpetuity of the Earth*.

† *Lectures on the Epistles of Paul to the Thessalonians*.

tions so strangely at variance with those to which the fancy of the modern Church is accustomed—and you will at least confess that these men had no wish to keep their brethren in the dark respecting the disastrous fortunes of God's truth in the age that was then just begun, nor any fear that the information would cut the sinews of evangelical exertion. Everywhere they tell us plainly, that, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven, it will be “in flaming fire, taking vengeance” on the disobedient nations. (2 Thess. i. 7, 8). Nay, Christendom itself will but resemble some horrid and mountainous funeral pyre, heaped up and ready for the burning.

And, finally, if we advance in our examination towards the wonders of the Apocalyptic scenery, the very first sight that meets the eye of faith, as if to assure our hearts that, whatever may be the intermediate trials of the Church, they shall all issue in the realization of her hope, is the vision of the Son of Man “coming with clouds,” as the Judge of a surprised and “wailing” world (Rev. i. 7); and even so the very last word, with which the Amen, the Faithful and True

Witness, closes the long line of revelation, and dismisses the Church from His presence to the warfare of ages, is a renewed promise of His own speedy return. (xxii. 20.) And what truth do the stupendous disclosures of the intervening chapters teach more clearly and impressively, than that, until that promise be fulfilled, we should look in vain for any period of effectual respite from the thick-coming waves of sorrow?

Thus, in the Epistles to the Seven Churches the people of God are uniformly reminded of the future kingdom, with its blessed variety of heavenly and eternal glories, as their peculiar, their only reward. (chaps. ii. iii.) We listen to the "new song" of the Royal Priesthood, and we hear an exulting anticipation of "reigning on the earth." But that song is sung by representatives of the Holy Catholic Church, who are even now resting from their labours, in the presence of the enthroned Lamb. (v. 8-10.) The loud appeal for vengeance of souls beneath the altar is answered by a gracious assurance that the "Lord, holy and true," will not fail to avenge them speedily, as soon as the work of martyrdom is itself fulfilled in the person of "their fellow-servants and their brethren." (vi. 10, 11.)

The innumerable, white-robed, palm-bearing multitude, that is seen in high festival and solemn triumph, celebrating the Feast of Tabernacles, are they who have been sealed and gathered "*out of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues,*" and they have all tasted the bitterness of "*the great tribulation.*" (vii. 9-14.) The frequent proclamation made by heavenly voices of "*Woe, woe, woe, to the inhabitants of the earth*" (viii. 13 ; ix. 12 ; xi. 14 ; xii. 12), ever and anon startles the ear, like the irrepressible outcry of him of old, who warned "*the people, and the city, and the temple,*" of their doom. But in spite of all warnings, and of ever-recurring judgments, the ungodly nations "*repent not of the works of their hands*" (ix. 20, 21 ; xvi. 9-11), and God's witnesses are "*clothed in sackcloth*" (xi. 3), and the heavenly, sun-clad, star-crowned Woman is forced to flee from before her enemies, and dwells in the wilderness, where she is nourished in secret by her Divine Champion. (xii. 1-6.) That "*power over all kindreds, and tongues, and nations,*" which of right belongs to her, as the promised dowry of "*the Bride, the Lamb's wife,*" is usurped (xiii.) by a Beast out of the sea, on whose heads is the name of blas-

phemy, and the "golden cup" of worldly pleasure and honour is "in the hand" of her impure, harlot rival. (xvii.) It is true that "the everlasting gospel" does never wholly perish from the earth; nay, it is true that, just before the dread crisis of wrath, its merciful voice is lifted up in perhaps a louder, more urgent, general call than ever before, at least since the apostolic age. (xiv. 6-8.) But be it carefully noted, that neither does this last visitation of God's long-suffering avail to avert "the hour of His judgment." Great Babylon "hearkens not to the voice of charmers, charm they ever so wisely." She, therefore, falls—suddenly falls—"in one hour"—"thrown down with violence," into the fiery flood, "like a great millstone cast into the sea" by the might of an angel. (xviii.) And not less plainly are we told, that, when "the battle of that great day of God Almighty" (xvi. 14) is to be fought, "heaven is opened," and He, whose "name is called the Word of God," re-appears at the head of His redeemed armies. (xix. 11, 13, 14.)

It is, then, as we devoutly believe, a vain thing—and affectionately we invite our brethren in Christ to weigh the matter, or at least, to bear

with us in our boldness—an utterly vain thing, let men say, and strive, and scoff as they will, to expect “the kingdoms of this world to become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ,” until, the seventh angel having sounded, God’s wrath comes upon the angry nations, and “the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that Thou shouldest give reward unto Thy servants the prophets, and to the saints, and them that fear Thy name, small and great.” (Rev. xi. 15–18.) And what reward is that, if not the holy blessedness of such as “have part in the first resurrection,” and who “live and reign with Christ a thousand years”? (xx. 4, 6.) Then will “the holy city, new Jerusalem, come down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband,” and will fill with her glory all the earth. (xxi. 2, 24–26.)

On a review of the whole subject, we feel abundantly justified in adopting for ourselves the emphatic language of one of the most distinguished members of the English Church :* “From first to last the consent and harmony is unbroken. There is not one single passage

* Rev. T. R. Birks.

which implies a long period of rest and triumph before the Lord's return ; there are many, very many, which exclude it, and prove it to be impossible. . . . There is no balance, no division of evidence on this point : it lies entirely, and without exception, on one side."

But now, in conclusion, we shall be asked—Must we, then, give up all hope for the nations? Shall the day never dawn, of which so many prophets from of old have sung, when the eye of God, looking down from heaven, shall rest upon a scene more glorious by far than that in which it rejoiced on the morning of the first sabbath? To all such queries our answer is, "God forbid!" Nay, brethren, we seek not to check the aspirations of faith, while we labour to establish faith on the only sure foundation of the word. Ours is not the malign ambition that would chill the heart of benevolence, and quench the flame of hope in the bosom of the man that loves his kind. Rather, that hope we would glorify, by raising it to a higher sphere, and subjecting it to the powers of the world that is to come. So far from resting in the thought, that earth with her teeming myriads shall eventually be destroyed,

or that, shrouded in the pall of “gross darkness” which now covers the peoples (Is. lx. 2),* she shall be sent forth, like Cain, under an eternal curse, a fugitive from the presence of God, our very delight is to trace, as God may enable us, the path of life, along which she shall yet be brought with singing, and everlasting joy upon her head, a redeemed captive—a welcome guest—a Royal Bride—into the holiest of all.

Far be it from us to question, that of all that God hath spoken to the fathers, of the times of restitution, not one jot or tittle shall fail of a glorious accomplishment. But may we not venture to claim that we have succeeded in proving irrefragably from Scripture, that no such consummation is to be expected, or can occur, *during* the present Gentile economy? And what, then, is the inference, but that it will *follow*?

And, meanwhile, beloved brethren, our present duty is as plain as it is urgent. By word and by life, as individuals and in our corporate church fellowship, we are called to testify, in our various spheres of labour, at home and abroad,

* לֹא־יָחַד ; Sept. ἕνεκα.

to Jews and Gentiles, in every land beneath the sun, the truth and grace and glory of our Lord. Thus giving all patient, earnest, prayerful diligence to our allotted task of planting and watering, let us not murmur nor faint if, after all our toils and sacrifices, the immediate increase is neither such nor so large as we might have desired and hoped for. (1 Cor. iii. 6, 7.) To every faithful, though suffering, labourer in Christ's vineyard it is surely a most blessed and animating thought—one that may well cheer and strengthen us under every heavy burden of care, and disappointment, and manifold temptations—that He whom we serve “knows our works, and tribulation, and poverty.” (Rev. ii. 9.) Great, also, shall be our recompense of reward.

Let us, then, brethren, arise, and yielding neither to faint-hearted, unbelieving languor, on the one hand, nor, on the other hand, to the idle illusions of an unscriptural confidence, let us address ourselves with fresh zeal to the fulfilment of this our high calling to preach the gospel to every creature, and so work together with God in His present gracious visitation of the nations. Nor will either the work itself be hindered, or our love for it impaired, if we shall henceforth

be enabled more habitually to remember that, in converting a sinner—one sinner—from the error of his way, we not only save a soul from death, and deepen the joy of angels, but we, at the same time, further the accomplishment of the number of God's elect, and hasten the coming of the Lord.*

* “Beseeching Thee that it may please Thee, of Thy gracious goodness, shortly to accomplish the number of Thine elect, and to hasten Thy kingdom.”—Church of England *Order for the Burial of the Dead*.



NOTES.



NOTES.

NOTE A, p. 6.

Some members of Synod, it has been intimated to me, while they were aware of the interesting nature of the question proposed for discussion, yet inclined to doubt the propriety of making it the theme of a missionary discourse. As to that, it is obvious that the speaker could judge only according to his own conviction of the *truth* of the view presented. For, if true, it is assuredly important, and the view to which it is opposed must be as pernicious as it is false, involving a very serious misapprehension of God's revealed counsels, and a flat contradiction of His immutable word, and dislodging, to the full extent of its influence, the cause of missions from its only scriptural foundation and relations to the Divine plan. When called on, therefore, to address the ministers and elders of the churches on that great enterprise of Christian

philanthropy, I really could think of no other topic so seasonable and urgent. If I hesitated at all, it was from the fear of being suspected of a design simply to provoke controversy, or of a wish to obtrude on my brethren private opinions, merely because those opinions were not generally acceptable. But as it is well for us ever to follow conscience in bearing witness to the truth, at whatever risk of misconception of our motives, so it becomes me here to express my thanks to God and my brethren for the earnest attention, and patient candour, with which the address was received.

NOTE B, p. 7.

To such as have not given much attention to the subject, these statements will probably sound strange and somewhat rash. But of their literal truth the writer has no doubt, and he confidently invites his readers to subject them to rigorous scrutiny. Let them only bear in mind the precise point to which the statements exclusively refer. There is no attempt here made to delineate the constitution of Christ's millennial kingdom, or to specify the acts of righteous judgment, and victorious grace, and creative power, whereby the kingdom shall be established, when the Lord returns in person to the earth, which, at His first coming, He redeemed by His blood for His own inheritance. On these matters students of the prophetic

word may easily differ. The single question now at issue is this, and nothing else, Shall the Lord's return be preceded by what is called a spiritual millennium of general holiness and peace in this present world?

Of *that* idea, then, we venture to say,

1. That "*it is very questionable whether, even so late as two hundred years ago, it had yet been heard of amongst good men.*" It is well known, that in the early part of the last century the able and learned Dr. Whitby, "conceiving this glorious conversion [of the Jews], . . . might be the very resurrection intended by St. John [Rev. xx. 4], and the flourishing condition and union both of the Jewish and Gentile church thus raised from the dead, and so continuing in peace and plenty, and a great increase of knowledge and righteousness, and a return of the primitive purity of doctrine and manners, might be the reign of the Saints on earth a thousand years," expressly speaks of "*this*" as a "*new hypothesis*," and wrote his famous *Treatise on the Millennium* for its illustration and defence. Certainly, few men of Whitby's day were better acquainted than he with whatever had been previously written on the subject; and in our own time the late Edward Bickersteth, whose name is still fragrant and venerable in the churches, has testified that he himself was unable to trace the "*new hypothesis*" any further. From the guarded phraseology of the Address, however, it will be seen that I do not wish to be understood as denying the possibility of

finding here and there suggestions of a similar scheme, prior to the date of Whitby's *Treatise*. John Howe, for example,* preached his fifteen sermons on the *Work of the Holy Spirit in reference to the Christian Church* in 1678. But, as they were not published till 1725, so whether "Christ shall personally appear at the battle of Armageddon, and shall personally reign afterwards upon the earth for a thousand years," as also whether "there will be any resurrection, before that time do commence, of the bodies of departed saints," these Howe treats as open questions, merely saying that he "will not assert" these things, and that he does "not think that any of these things are confidently to be asserted."

2. "*Not a trace of it is to be found in the Standards of Westminster.*" And it would be, indeed, a strange thing if there were, when we remember the querulous report of good Principal Baillie, one of the five Scotch Commissioners to the Westminster Assembly: "I marvel I can find nothing in it against the millenaries. I cannot think the author [Forbes] a millenary. I cannot dream why he should have omitted an error so famous in antiquity, and so troublesome among us; for the most of the chief divines here [at Westminster], not only Independents, but others, such as Twisse, Marshall, Palmer, and many more, are express Chiliasts;"—they believed, that is to say, in the millennial reign

* See also the close of Archbishop Tillotson's Sermon on Acts i. 3.

of Christ and His saints over the renewed earth after the resurrection. But, in regard to the one point with which we have now to do, it would appear that there was actually no division of sentiment whatever in that illustrious convocation. See the Confession of Faith, ch. xxxiii., sect. 3, *Of the Last Judgment*: "As Christ would have us to be certainly persuaded that there shall be a day of judgment, both to deter all men from sin, and for the greater consolation of the godly in their adversity; so will He have that day unknown to men, that they may shake off all carnal security, and be *always watchful, because they know not at what hour the Lord will come; and may be ever prepared to say, Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly. Amen.*" I confess that I do not see how any man could intelligently assent to that article, and at the same time believe that the Lord will not come for at least 1000, or it may be 360,000 years. (On this branch of our inquiry I beg to refer the reader to a small pamphlet published in 1843, by Grigg & Elliot, of Philadelphia, of which I shall be indulged, for the sake of associations which are now much more curious than painful, in giving the title in full: "Millenarianism tried by the Standards of the Westminster Assembly of Divines. Being a statement presented to the Presbytery of New York, at their meeting, November 22d, 1842. By the Rev. John Lillie, A. M.")

3. "*Or in the Confessions and other remains of the Reformation period.*" Here again a little candid

discrimination will be required. Whether, in consequence of the odium brought on the millennarian name by the frenzies of Münzer and the Anabaptists of the sixteenth century, as well as by the old Cerinthian heresy, or whether because of the opinion, which, under favour of Rome, had long been current in Christendom, that the millennium, whether as a period of definite or of indefinite duration, began either with the introduction of the gospel, or with the conversion of Constantine—and perhaps all these considerations enter into the explanation of the fact—it is quite true that the Reformers have little or nothing to say for *the thousand years' reign*, while their denunciations are frequent, and righteously severe, of a perverted and polluted Chiliasm. But that they did, at the same time, generally and steadfastly hold to the ideas of a restored Israel, and a renewed earth, and, in particular, that not one of them ever allowed the modern notion of an intervening millennium to becloud his solemn, earnest outlook for the Lord's Second Coming—so much is perfectly well known to all who have even a moderate acquaintance with their writings.

Of course, this is not the place for any elaborate induction of evidence. But, as these pages may be read by some to whom the whole subject is new, I may be allowed to introduce here a very few such extracts as come most readily to hand.

We take up, then, at random, some "Life of Martin Luther" (Michelet's), and, glancing through it, we light everywhere on things of this sort:—

“The last day, I fully believe, is not far from us.”
“These signs, if I mistake not, announce the last day.”—“Grace and peace in our Lord Jesus Christ. The world hastens to its end, and I often think that the day of judgment may well overtake me before I have finished my translation of the Holy Scriptures. All temporal things predicted there are being fulfilled. The Roman Empire inclines to its ruin; the Turk has reached the height of his power; the splendour of the Papacy suffers eclipse; the world is cracking in every corner, as if about to crumble to pieces.”—“I trust these are blessed signs of the approaching end of all things.”—“I trust that with this rending of the world Christ will hasten His coming, and crush the globe to atoms.”—Master Philip said that the Emperor Charles would live to be eighty-four. Dr. Luther replied: “The world will not last so long. Ezekiel is against it. If we drive out the Turk, the prophecy of Daniel is fulfilled; and, of a certainty, the day of judgment is then at hand.”—“May our Lord, then, come quickly, and take me with Him. May He, above all, come with His day of judgment.”—A guest of his said that, if the world were to last fifty years, many things might yet turn up. “God forbid,” exclaimed Luther, “it would be worse than all the past. There would arise many other sects, which are now hidden within the hearts of men. May the Lord come, and cut all this short, for there is no hope of improvement.”—“The day of judgment must soon come; for that the papal church should reform is an impossibility,

neither will the Turks and Jews. . . . I see nothing else to be done but to say, Lord, Thy kingdom come!"—So much for Luther.

As for Calvin, let us try the prince of commentators on one or two texts:—

Luke xviii. 8 he calls "a clear prediction of Christ, that from His ascension into heaven until His return men will everywhere remain in unbelief."—On 1 Thess. i. 10 he remarks: "Whosoever would persevere in the course of a holy life, let him apply his whole mind to the hope of Christ's coming."—At 1 Thess. iv. 17, he rejects with horror certain frenzies (*deliria*) which he charges on "Origen and the Chiliasts," as if they *limited* the reign of the Saints with Christ to a thousand years; but so far is he from expecting the reign before the Advent, that he tells us immediately before, at v. 15, that the Apostle's aim, in speaking of himself as one of those who should live till the Lord come, was "to rouse the expectation of the Thessalonians, and so to hold all the pious in suspense, that they shall not count on any delay whatever. For even supposing him to have known himself, by special revelation, that Christ would come somewhat later, still this was to be delivered as the common doctrine of the church, that the faithful might be ready at all hours."—To which I shall only add these solemn words on 1 Pet. iv. 7: "The end he speaks of is not merely that of each several individual, but the entire renovation of the world; as if he said that Christ will shortly come, and put an end to all things. It is not strange, therefore, if we

are overwhelmed by worldly cares, and held in slumber, or if the sight of present things dazzles our eyes; because we do all commonly promise ourselves an eternity in this world; never, at least, does the end come into mind. Whereas, did the trump of Christ sound in our ears, it would keenly smite all our senses, nor suffer them to lie thus torpid. It might be objected, however, that a long series of ages has elapsed since Peter wrote this, and still the end is not seen. I answer, that to us the time seems long, for this reason, that we measure its length by the spaces of the present life, but that, could we have respect to the perpetuity of the life to come, many generations would be for us as it were a moment; 2 Pet. iii. 8. Moreover, IT MUST BE HELD AS A FIRST PRINCIPLE, *that, ever since the appearing of Christ, there is nothing left to the faithful, but with wakeful minds to be always intent on His Second Advent.*—Let it not offend any, if they now discover, for the first time, that a genuine, unmutilated Calvinism embraces more “points” than they had supposed.

In the case of the great Scottish Reformer, I avail myself of the following passage from the Rev. A. A. Bonar’s “*Redemption Drawing Nigh*,” a book which would no doubt have been republished amongst us long ago, but that it contains a little too much of hitherto unrecognized truth:—“The incidental manner in which JOHN KNOX refers to it” [the Blessed Hope], “is sufficient to show the place it habitually held in his mind. His letter to the ‘Faithful in London, Newcastle and Berwick,’ has

this clause also in its title,—‘And to all others within the realm of England *that love the Coming of our Lord Jesus.*’ He writes another ‘*Comfortable epistle*, sent to the afflicted Church of Christ, exhorting them to bear His cross with patience, *looking every hour for His coming again*, to the great comfort and consolation of His chosen.’ His letter to his mother-in-law has this sentence prefixed to the salutation, ‘*He comes and shall not tarry*, in whom is our comfort and final felicity.’ And in his ‘*Treatise on Fasting*,’ he yet more clearly shows what his noble spirit felt to be desirable in that day. ‘What were this also,’ he exclaims, ‘but to reform the face of the whole earth, which never was, nor yet shall be, till that righteous King and Judge appear for the restoration of all things.’”

Similar glowing utterances follow from Principal Rollock, John Welsh, and others. But what has already been given will suffice for the Reformers, especially when we have such a testimony as this, concerning the whole of them, from Bishop Latimer’s third sermon on the Lord’s Prayer: “Therefore, *all* those excellent learned men whom, without doubt, God hath sent into this world in these latter days to give the world warning—*all* those men do gather out of sacred scripture that the last day *cannot be far off*. And this is most certain and sure, that, whensoever He cometh, He cometh not too timely: for all things which ought to come before are passed now: so that if He come *this night or to-morrow* He cometh not too early.”

4. "*And quite as little in the writings of the Fathers.*" This, it will be observed, is a still more sweeping assertion than that of Dr. Shedd, in the singularly inadequate and, I say it reluctantly, somewhat unfair chapter on millennarianism, in his *History of Christian Doctrine*. "There are no traces of Chiliasm," he says, "in the writings of" certain Fathers whom he names, and then, with rather hasty logic, he "infers that this tenet was not the received faith of the church, certainly down to the year 150." It would have been more to the purpose, could he have pointed out any traces of *opposition* to Chiliasm in the writings either of those particular Fathers, or of any others within that period. For it seems to be conceded that *every one of the Apostolical Fathers, who says anything at all on the subject, is a Chiliast*. And that all the rest were not less so, would be no very violent inference from the fact, recognized by Dr. S. himself, that "so general had the tenet become in the last half of the second century, that Justin Martyr declares that it was the belief of all but the Gnostics."

Our immediate concern, however, let the reader once more be reminded, is not with Chiliasm. We likewise freely admit, that in the third and subsequent centuries the Church lost the ardour of her early longing for her Lord's return, and that, as the natural consequence of that, as well as of the abominations charged—Mosheim thinks, unjustly—on Cerinthus, and the great authority of Origen with his monstrous system of allegorical interpretation, to say nothing of the growing ascendancy

of Rome, she gradually relaxed her hold on the primitive faith. But, in spite of all this, we can but renew the invitation for any one to show, that any one of the Fathers, in any of the centuries, held to anything like what we may call the modern missionary millennium. Augustine himself, who is sometimes absurdly named as in some way responsible for it, taught expressly, in his strange exegesis of Rev. xx., that the binding of Satan and the millennial reign began when the Church advanced beyond Judea, and continue all through the times of Antichrist's tyranny, which ends only, as he clearly perceived, with the Lord's advent. (See chapters 7-13 of the *De Civitate Dei*.)

NOTE C, p. 12.

Of this commendable moderation of the speaker a somewhat odd, and perhaps ingenious, use was made by the excellent Secretary of the General Assembly's Board of Foreign Missions, in the remarks, of course not official, with which he "felt himself called upon" to follow the delivery of the Address. With grave earnestness he assured the audience that "the Old Testament is as much the word of God as the New"!

Was not, then, my friend aware that the speaker, and all who share his views, regard the Old Testament as their own inexhaustible arsenal and impregnable stronghold? Nothing, we are well per-

suaded, has exerted such a disastrous influence on the interest of Bible readers in general, in that wonderful portion of the Divine oracles, as the prevailing fast-and-loose style of hermeneutics, by means of which, with an ordinary measure of dexterity, anything can either be made out of anything or nothing, or reduced to nothing; by which, for example, the national Israel, as such, God's first-born son (Ex. iv. 22), is stripped of "the glory and the covenants, and the promises" (Rom. ix. 4), and the Son of David is robbed of His father's throne. (Luke i. 32).

And have we not here, also, it may be asked in passing, at least one reasonable explanation of the small measure of success that the Church generally has had in addressing the Jews? "I leave it," says the illustrious Joseph Mede, "to the judgment of learned men, and men well able to judge in such-like mysteries in divinity, whether this be not the best and readiest way to deal with the Jews—not to wrest those plain prophecies, touching things appertaining to this last and glorious coming of Christ to His first coming; for, while we do so, the Jews laugh and scorn at us, and are hardened in their infidelity." *

But now as to the particular point in hand, the reader will probably acquit the speaker of any disposition to shrink from Old Testament tests, if he will take the trouble to examine with care the few

* See much more to the same effect in *The (New York) Jewish Chronicle*, vol. ii. pp. 12-14, and vol. iv. pp. 274-276.

passages here subjoined—(and at every step I am compelled to drop scores of passages equally suitable),—applying to them no other principles of interpretation than such as he would employ in the case of any other writing that was meant, not to bewilder, but to be understood; they will then be found to include every point mentioned in the Address:—Deut. xxxii. 36–43; Psalm lxix. 34–36; Psalm xcvi.; cii. 13–28; Is. ii., iv., xi., xxiv. 1, 23; xxv. 6–8 (compared with 1 Cor. xv. 54); xxvii. 1, (comp. Rev. xx. 1–3); xlix. 13–26; lix. 17–21; lx., &c.; Jer. iii. 16–18; Dan. xii. 1–2 (comp. Matt. xxiv. 21; Rev. xvi. 18); Joel iii. 9–21; Mic. v. 3–15; Zech. ii. 10–13; viii. 7–23; xii. 2–10; xiv.

NOTE D, p. 15.

It will help the reader to understand how such texts were handled in the great ages of theology, even by men who would yet have refused to be called “Chiliasts” or “Millenaries,” if we here insert part of the comment of Pareus, the famous doctor of Heidelberg, on Matt. xxiv. 14:—

“Now this universal preaching is not to be understood strictly—in which sense it never will happen that the gospel shall be preached absolutely to all nations at once (for there will be a perpetual separation of the Church and the world)—but by synecdoche or distribution; it shall be preached, not to the Jews alone, but to other nations also,

without distinction of people. . . . However it may be with the new world, or other regions still hidden from us, it is a false interpretation of our Lord's words, as if there were not to be a spot on the earth's surface, where the gospel shall not be preached. For it is a thing never to be looked for, that the whole world shall become Christian; since the enemies of the Church, together with Antichrist, shall not cease but at the last coming of Christ. Christ must rule in the midst of enemies, until all are made his footstool, which will be at the end of the age,"—*in fine saeculi*.

Compare the universal terms in which Paul describes the spread of the evangelical testimony even in his day, Col. i. 6, 23.

NOTE E, p. 16.

Once or twice during the Sessions of Synod, allusion was made to the parables of the mustard seed and of the leaven (Matt. xiii. 31–33), as favouring the ordinary view; and it is very natural, that such as would cling to that view should betake themselves to the single spot in all the New Testament, which, seen from a distance, might seem to promise a much-needed standpoint amid the swelling waters. But there too, I think, they are likely to find their footing quite as unsteady, as the space is certainly limited.

1. In the first place, there is a radical difference amongst commentators as to the general interpretation of these two parables; some referring the development of the wide-branching tree from the least of all seeds to the growth of the hierarchy out of the lowly beginning of the gospel; and the leaven, to the working of Divine grace in the individual believer, or else—and it is true that the symbol of leaven is always elsewhere in Scripture used in a bad sense*—to the corruptions that were to overspread and pervade the Church.

2. But let us take both parables together, as they are commonly understood, of genuine Christianity in the world; and then the prominent ideas are the smallness of its beginning, its continuous existence, inward force, outward expansion, and ultimate universal triumph.

3. Comparing, indeed, the obscurity of the manger of Bethlehem, and the upper room at Jerusalem, with what has already sprung from them, no one would say, even if the Church were now to perish from off the face of the earth, that the prophecy of the mustard seed had failed of a wondrous fulfilment.

4. And as for the parable of the leaven, it is, (1.), simply impossible, whatever else it teaches, that our Lord could have meant to teach by it, that the consummation represented by the *leavening of*

* Dr. A. Alexander—whose own judgment, however, would seem to incline to the above interpretation—excepts Lev. xxiii. 17; but see Bonar's *Commentary* on that verse.

the whole was to be reached prior to the end of the world or age; because that were palpably, and in the same breath, to contradict His own exposition of the parables of the tares and the drag-net. And (2.), it is no less absurd to insist on a resemblance at all points between the *manner of the leaven's operation*, "till the whole was leavened," and that in which the Church advances towards her millennial glory. There are not a few points in which the analogy breaks down entirely. For instance, the "three measures of meal," into which the leaven was introduced, remain the same three measures throughout; but it will not be contended that the uncounted millions of the apostolic age, and of the subsequent ages, who died uninfluenced by the gospel, are yet to be assimilated by its transforming power. Then, the leaven had not to struggle with, and overcome, any counteracting element; how different with the gospel! Again, every step, so to speak, that the leaven made in its advance, it continued to hold; but in how many countries, where the gospel once greatly flourished, has it died out! And, lastly, the leavening process goes forward through the mass steadily and without pause; whereas, since the first centuries, and excepting in new countries settled by the European races, the gospel has made scarcely any outward progress at all,

In these particulars, it is evident, there is no likeness, but a marked contrast, between the two cases. It may even be that a larger measure than has been generally recognized, of the significance of

the parable, lies couched in the *hiding* of the leaven ; as if it remained hidden overnight, working, indeed, but silently and unseen, until in the morning, when examined, lo, "the whole was leavened!" And so, with regard to the Divine grace in the gospel, what we are to think of is its secret but irresistible force, and the grandeur of the result, and not either the unbroken flow, or the abrupt stages, by which that result should be reached. It is, in fact, a common characteristic of prophecy to deal only with the crisis or consummation, and overlook preliminary details. The Angel of the Annunciation, in foretelling the greatness of the Virgin's Child (Luke i. 30-33), said nothing of the cross, and the grave, and the resurrection.

NOTE F, p. 17.

Last year (from May 1st, 1864, to May 1st, 1865) the entire income of the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions was "larger than in any preceding year, the receipts being" (according to the Abstract of the Annual Report in the Assembly's Minutes, \$271,621.72 ; but, according to the Report itself) \$271,701.72. Deducting from this the sum of \$57,438.38, received from legacies, another religious body, and friends in foreign lands, we have \$214,263.34 contributed during the year by 232,450 communicants, or a fraction over 92 cents a head, for the conversion of the world ! And yet I doubt whether the average rate in other churches was

even so high as that. Indeed, the same Report informs us that, in answer to a special appeal issued by the Executive Committee in September, "the grace of giving was signally exemplified."

All this, while the City of New York alone is spending, we are told, its \$5,000,000 yearly on its amusements, and more than half of Christ's laborious ministers in this prosperous land are struggling—very many of them struggling in vain—to pay for their daily bread. Presbyterian as I am, I cannot help thinking now and then, that, if nothing less will serve us at present than the conversion of the whole world, the first thing in order is the conversion of the Church.

NOTE G, p. 18.

I do not feel it to be necessary, either to suppress or modify the sentence to which this note refers, because our well-beloved Secretary deemed it expedient to declare, in the face of the Synod, that, if he could believe that the view advocated in the Address was the true one, his own zeal in the cause would be seriously impaired. Some, perhaps, may have thought at the time, of Jonah's petulant refusal to deliver the Divine message, because the result, he suspected, was not likely to be according to his wishes.

His missionary zeal impaired, if the world is not to be converted before Christ appears! Were it really so, what less could be said, than that his zeal must be of a different sort, and rest on a very different basis,

from the zeal of Paul, who was quite willing to struggle on and die, "if he might by all means save *some*," (1 Cor. ix. 22)—from that of all, who in past ages have been strengthened to do the mightiest things for Christ and His truth (see Note B)—from that of his own martyred brother,* who also laboured and died in the light of this blessed hope—from that of the many other missionaries on heathen ground, who tell us plainly that one of the strongest influences, by which their hearts are kept from sinking utterly in the contemplation of the small results of their best efforts, comes from this same maligned view of the purposes of God.

I said, *were it really so* ; for most certainly it is not so. In his needless apprehension of injury to the cause, which he loves and so faithfully serves, the Secretary did himself injustice, or rather he wronged the grace given unto him. Probably no man in the Church feels more habitually or more strongly than he the full force of most of the scriptural motives to missionary exertion, such as the plain commandment of Christ, and His universal power—the spirit of Christian compassion for the perishing—the universal need of the gospel, and its universal adaptation—together with the fact that, as there is no other way of human salvation than that which the gospel makes known, so neither is there any other instrumentality employed for guiding men into that way, than the gospel preached among all nations for the obedience of faith. Let him only combine with these considerations—substituting it in the place of the secular glitter of the "new hypothesis"—this other

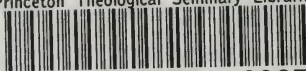
* The Rev. Walter M. Lowrie.

scriptural thought — a thought most precious, one should suppose, to all who love the Lord—that, just as soon as the special work of this Gentile dispensation is accomplished, in the gathering of the “Church of the first-born”—“the first-fruits unto God and to the Lamb” (Heb. xii. 23; Rev. xiv. 4), the Desire of all nations will come again to fulfil His people’s joy.

In the meanwhile, that so good a man should have been tempted, even under what he may have considered a severe provocation, into making such an avowal in the presence of his brethren, and in the assurance, no doubt, of the sympathy of many, was to me, I confess, and to some others, proof enough of the timeliness of the Address.

“Come, then, Christian reader, and partake with us of this blessed hope, and of these Scriptural and holy joys. They are not the novelties of the day, but the old paths in which the flock has walked from the very beginning. They are not modern inventions, but they pervade the Bible from Genesis to Revelation. They are not new things in Christianity; the early fathers and martyrs firmly believed them, and died in the faith of them. They humble man, they exalt the Saviour, and they promote holiness. Search the Scriptures, see them plainly there, believe them, confess them, and spread them through the earth.”—Bickersteth, *Restoration of the Jews*.

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